

PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

AT THE

OPENING OF THE ONE HUNDRED AND NINTH
SESSION.

OF THE

GENERAL MEDICAL COUNCIL.

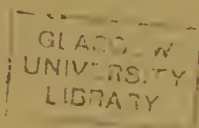
May 27, 1919.

GENTLEMEN,

When we last met Peace had already dawned on the world. The dawn is now brightening into day. Though the sky is not free from clouds, the light is come, and we rejoice in it. "Whatever troubles are before this nation, we face the future as victors." Our professional brethren are returning in thousands from the fields of war, and we join with the nation they have served so well in giving them welcome. We shall ever cherish with pride the memory of those who will not return, resolved that, so far as in us lies, their sacrifice shall be our inspiration. It is the duty and privilege of the medical profession to ensure, through its various organisation, the easy resumption of civil activity by all its war-worn members. The "dearth of doctors" through the lean years of warfare has left many arrears to be overtaken, many gaps to be filled. There is work for all good men who seek it. The immediate problem is its proper distribution. The several War Committees, which rendered signal service to the country both in the "mobilisation" and, till the War Office otherwise ruled, in the "demobilisation" of medical officers, are now rendering a complementary service by aiding their resettlement in normal practice.

In such and kindred service the members of this COUNCIL have borne a full share during the War. The honourable distinctions which HIS MAJESTY has graciously conferred on Sir NORMAN MOORE, Baronet, on Sir CHARLES TOMES, and on Sir JENNER VERRALL are a gratifying recognition both of their personal

A



eminence and of their fruitful co-operation in our professional labours. The COUNCIL to which they belong is honoured in their promotion ; it congratulates them, and itself, on this public acknowledgment of their devotion to the common weal.

No less than four new members have joined our fellowship, and enter now upon their part in our common responsibilities. Untimely death removed last year our friend Mr MEREDITH TOWNSEND : by appointment of the Society of Apothecaries of London his place is taken by Colonel B. B. CONNOLLY, C.B., distinguished both in war and in peace. Disablement by ill-health, which we deplore, has led to the retirement of Sir FREDERICK TAYLOR, our late TREASURER, and of Professor SYMINGTON, the eminent anatomist of Queen's University, Belfast. In their stead the University of London has sent us Dr S. RUSSELL WELLS, physician and Senator, and the Belfast University Professor T. SINCLAIR, C.B., surgeon and Senator, both of whom we receive with the high expectations which their record warrants. Dr BARRS, appointed by the University of Leeds as its first representative in 1904, has during fifteen years contributed amenity and good sense to our discussions, and given important aid to the PHARMACOPŒIA COMMITTEE. We part with him regretfully, while we offer a hearty welcome to his successor, Professor T. WARDROP GRIFFITH, C.M.G., physician, anatomist, and Lieutenant-Colonel.

We welcome also our REGISTRAR back from the Army. The brevet rank conferred on Colonel KING marks the importance of the exacting military duties he has fulfilled. The COUNCIL will doubtless desire to make appropriate acknowledgment of the admirable manner in which Mr A. J. COCKINGTON has carried out the REGISTRAR's functions during his absence.

Before we assemble for the Autumn Session preparation for a General Election of Direct Representatives, postponed by successive Orders in Council from 1916, will fall to be made by the GENERAL and BRANCH REGISTRARS. In this connexion I intimate to the COUNCIL with satisfaction the appointment of Mr THOMAS H. GRAHAM as REGISTRAR of the SCOTTISH BRANCH, in the room of the late Mr JAMES ROBERTSON. Mr GRAHAM's wide knowledge of professional conditions, gained as Secretary

to the Medical Emergency Committee for Scotland during the War, will be of great advantage to him in the office he has now undertaken.

The older members of the COUNCIL will learn with regret of the death of our former LEGAL ASSESSOR, Mr M. MUIR MACKENZIE. In the early days of the COUNCIL his wise guidance and advice in reference to its statutory functions were invaluable. His personal charm of manner and his sterling character won for him the affectionate regard of all. It is right that I should also mention the loss of Dr BATEMAN, Secretary of the Medical Defence Union, who in cases which came up for enquiry before this tribunal did much to assist it in reaching a just decision, and who was always ready to apply his extensive legal and medical knowledge to professional causes.

The last year of the War has affected the COUNCIL'S work and resources in ways foreseen and unforeseen.

In respect of Finance, our surplus of revenue over expenditure at the end of 1918 was lower than the year before. But it amounted to some £341, and was thus better than we expected. Economy during the COUNCIL'S Sessions has appreciably diminished its expenditure. The current year is likely to be our worst in respect of income from registration-fees, and we may find ourselves at the end of it with a balance on the wrong side ; but thereafter we may look for better times.

The *Medical Register*, whose issue has been greatly delayed by difficulties as to paper, and by the preoccupation of the printers with Government work, shows that 1077 new names were added, and 946 were removed on account of death, in 1918. Of the new names, 148 were entered in the *Colonial List* and 16 in the *Foreign List*. Taking account also of restorations on the one hand and erasures on the other, the net increase in the number of registered practitioners for the year is 107.

To the *Dentists Register* 147 names have been added, and 104 removed, giving a net increase for the year 1918 of only 43. This is an improvement on the preceding year, when only 12 names were added ; but it is still far from meeting the need of the country for qualified dental practitioners.

Since November, the registrations on the *Colonial List* have greatly multiplied. Many Australian and Canadian graduates, while awaiting their return overseas, have thus sought legal qualification for practice in this country, chiefly (so we understand) with a view to improving their experience and giving helpful service in the hospitals.

The *Students' Registers* for 1918 show that, while 2,253 began medical study during the year, only 161 entered upon the dental curriculum. The causes of this shortage of dental students have, as you know, been the object of careful enquiry by a Departmental Committee, to which I will refer later.

At the instance of the Ministry of National Service, I again requested the authorities of the Medical Schools of the United Kingdom to furnish me with returns showing the number of students actually in attendance on courses of professional instruction in January 1919. This final War Census showed that the total number, which in October 1917 was 7,018, and in May 1918 was 7,630, had risen in January 1919 to 9,490. Between May 1918 and January 1919, the First-year students had increased from 2,013 to 2,907, as compared with 1,480 registered in 1913. The junior students had thus practically doubled since the year preceding the War. But the students in the Final Year of their curriculum numbered only 936 men and 222 women, or barely enough to supply to the *Register* the normal increment of newly-qualified practitioners during the current year.

First-year students who were on service have returned to the Schools in almost overwhelming numbers for the summer session. The accumulated freshmen of a succession of years, whose first year's course was broken by the summons to military service, together with a number of educated men and officers entering for the first time on the medical curriculum with subsidies from the Government, have flooded the schools, and taxed severely their accommodation and their teaching staff. With the object of giving all practicable facilities to men who have fought for their country, equipment has been improvised and temporary instructors provided; and I am informed that at some centres it has even been necessary to refuse admission to normal students proceeding in the ordinary course from secondary schools to Schools of Medicine. Some of the difficulties felt

this summer in dealing with numbers so far above the average will no doubt be lightened in the following years, as the professional schools are able to re-adjust their arrangements; but they cannot all be surmounted without heavy expenditure, and it may be that the State will have to lend substantial assistance to enable these institutions to meet the needs of ex-service students. In any case it seems certain that within five years' time the depletion in the ranks of the profession caused by the War will be much more than made good. No useful purpose can therefore be served by continuing to permit immature boys and girls to leave the secondary schools for medical study before their general education has been fully completed; and the COUNCIL will accordingly do well to press for the requirement from all entrants on the curriculum of a preliminary test not inferior in standard to that required for entrance on a course in Arts or Science. If the overloaded curriculum is to be lightened to make room for new branches, as reformers are constantly urging, the instruction in the present essential subjects must be condensed and abbreviated. This requires that the student shall bring to them a mind already trained and furnished, so that from the outset he can be trusted to observe, to reflect, and to read intelligently for himself. The Entrance Board of the Scottish Universities has already decided to assimilate the conditions for admission to the Faculty of Medicine to those for admission to the Faculties of Arts or Science. We all desire that, as there is no lack in the number of aspirants to a professional qualification, so there shall be no question of their intellectual fitness to embark on professional study. If we could safely assume that medical students were all well-grounded and well-trained at school, and had all in some adequate measure learned how to learn, it would be easier for medical teachers to make their scientific instruction "intensive," and to broaden the professional courses so as to cover the special aspects and developments of medicine that press for inclusion in the curriculum. We cannot say that the assumption is yet justified; but the policy of the COUNCIL is, and ought to be, to hasten the attainment of the educational standard it implies, and the time is ripe for further advance in this direction.

The enquiry set on foot by the EDUCATION COMMITTEE, at your request, relating to the instruction of students in the preventive side of their professional work, has made some progress during the recess, and an *interim* communication on the subject will doubtless be furnished to you. The information derived from a comprehensive inspection and visitation of the qualifying examinations would, in my opinion, supplement usefully the data supplied by the enquiry. It will be for the EDUCATION and EXAMINATION COMMITTEES jointly to advise the COUNCIL on this matter. The *Standing Orders* prescribe the method and the scope of the action to be taken whenever the COUNCIL decides that action is opportune. The general stocktaking which the War made impracticable might properly be undertaken forthwith, if only as a needful preparation for the "reconstruction" of peace.

The modifications in the *Pharmacopæia*, made in 1917 and 1918 to meet war conditions, were early in the year announced by the Government Authorities concerned to be no longer necessary, the supplies of sugar, glycerin, and fats applicable to pharmaceutical uses being once more sufficient. By direction of the EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE, after consultation with the PHARMACOPŒIA COMMITTEE, the proper legal steps were accordingly taken to withdraw and cancel the temporary schedules of alterations; and the text of the *British Pharmacopæia* 1914 was thus, after due notice, reinstated on April 30, 1919. It will probably be necessary to print a new issue of the volume, for which there is a continuous demand, both in this country and abroad.

Several measures of importance to the profession of medicine have been before Parliament, and some of them have made unusually rapid progress.

The *Ministries of Health Bill*, which occupied your attention last Session, has undergone a transformation. The clauses relating to Scotland have been embodied in a separate *Bill*, providing for the constitution of a Scottish Board of Health under the Presidency of the Secretary for Scotland, with a new Parliamentary Under-Secretary as Vice-President. The omission

of Ireland from the scope of the original *Bill*, on which you commented at an earlier stage, has been supplied by the insertion of clauses establishing a corresponding Board of Health for that country. These and other points, to which at your request I called the LORD PRESIDENT'S attention, have received careful consideration from the Government; and the amendments introduced at its instance show that an endeavour has been made to give effect to your suggestions. The *Bills*, as you are aware, provide little more than the machinery for concentrating in a single Department, for each division of the Kingdom, the administrative activities concerned with Public Health that are now distributed over numerous Departments. The conditions of transfer are in many instances undefined; they have yet to be determined by Orders in Council, the drafts of which will be submitted for public discussion. Much will depend on their terms, and it may be expedient that the COUNCIL should empower the EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE to consider such draft Orders as they are issued, and if necessary to make representations thereon in the light of any general instructions given by the COUNCIL. But much more will depend on the motive power actuating the Departmental machinery, and the spirit in which it is worked by our administrators. The provision of Consultative or Advisory Councils, free to offer their counsel to the responsible Minister on matters of which they have special knowledge, will it is hoped afford to the medical profession full scope for exercising a helpful influence in the solution of the manifold problems in State Medicine that confront the new Departments. The EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE, which had to take certain steps on your behalf at its February meeting, will report to you on its action in this connexion.

Two *Bills*, providing in different ways for the *Registration of Nurses*, are before Parliament. Though they are at different stages in their progress, I understand that an attempt will be made to consolidate or otherwise to reconcile them. Their proposals fulfil some of the conditions formulated in previous *Resolutions* of the COUNCIL on the subject. Both *Bills*, however, omit a provision which you deemed essential, namely, that the Rules framed by the Registration Authority, for regulating

and restricting the professional practice of nurses, should be forwarded for consideration by this COUNCIL before they are finally approved by the PRIVY COUNCIL. This provision was, by your desire, incorporated in the several *Midwives Acts*. I have accordingly reminded the LORD PRESIDENT of your *Resolution* upon it, and am assured that it will not be overlooked.

Another *Bill*, which if it passed into law would have the effect of arresting the progress of exact knowledge bearing on the health of animals and man, has made some progress in Parliament. In the interest of preventive and curative medicine strong protests have been made against the measure by the leading medical authorities, whose members are well aware of the benefits humanity has derived from the scientific investigation of animal function. By these protests, with which we as professional men must needs sympathise, and which have been ably enforced by medical members of the House of Commons, Parliament has been made cognisant of the harmful nature of the proposed legislation : and Government has been moved to propose effective safeguards. I am not without hope that reasonable counsels will in the end prevail over uninformed prejudice.

The *Report* of the Committee appointed by the LORD PRESIDENT, at the request of this COUNCIL, to enquire into the extent and gravity of the evils of Dental Practice by persons not qualified under the *Dentists Act*, was issued in February, and has been circulated to members. The DENTAL EDUCATION AND EXAMINATION COMMITTEE have had the *Report* under consideration, and will have a communication upon it to make to you.

The Departmental Committee agrees with the COUNCIL in several significant conclusions. It is not needful that I should mention to-day more than the following :—

(1) That very grave evils are associated with the unqualified practice of dentistry ;

(2) That the supply of qualified dentists is at present insullicient to meet all public requirements ;

(3) That the main causes of this shortage are the unsatisfactory state of the law in regard to unqualified practice, and the duration and cost of training for a dental qualification ;

(4) That to meet the evils disclosed, the legal prohibition of dental practice by unregistered persons is essential ;

(5) That, under prescribed conditions, unregistered persons who have reputably practised dentistry for five years should, in the event of prohibition being enforced, be admitted to registration as " dentists " or " dental practitioners," by a Special (*ad hoc*) Committee including members of this COUNCIL.

The Committee proposes that a Statutory Dental Board shall be constituted, under this COUNCIL, for the government of the dental profession thus enlarged. The Board would have the charge of the new *Register*, and exercise disciplinary control over all registered persons, subject in certain cases to appeal to the whole COUNCIL. The dental members of the Board would be made members of the COUNCIL. The Board would, moreover, administer a new fund, derived from the annual licence fees which it is proposed that registered dental practitioners should pay, devoting the surplus, after meeting expenses, to such purposes as dental scholarships, aid to dental schools, and dental research. Weighty suggestions are made by the Committee with regard to the *minimum* curriculum for dental students, and the provision of public dental services. These will doubtless receive, as they deserve, the fullest consideration by the COUNCIL and by the Government. The essential recommendations, on which for the moment attention will naturally be concentrated, are those dealing with (1) the prohibition of unlicensed practice in the future, and (2) the registration for the purpose of regulation and control of unregistered practitioners who have, without hindrance of the law as it stands, acquired a reasonable measure of experience by actual practice in the past.

The Departmental Committee is justified in its conclusion that, in any fresh legislation, these two proposals must be held to stand or fall together. I judge from the discussions that have taken place here that this is also the conviction of the COUNCIL, based not only on its experience in administering the *Dentists Act* for over forty years, but also on its study of the development of dental legislation in the overseas dominions and in foreign countries.

The final conclusion of the Departmental Committee urges, in terms even stronger than those used by the COUNCIL, the imperative necessity for legislative reform. "The State cannot afford to allow the health of the workers of the nation to be continuously undermined by dental neglect." "The present anomalous position, . . . casting undeserved odium and dishonour on a scientific profession, is intolerable, and should be dealt with immediately."

The COUNCIL could not desire a fuller vindication of the representations it made to the LORD PRESIDENT. The responsibility for the next step rests with the Government and with Parliament.

Some of the enquiries to be held this Session, into charges made against medical practitioners, present novel features, on which you will probably desire to take counsel with your LEGAL ADVISERS. At the instance of the PENAL CASES COMMITTEE I have placed the facts before them for preliminary consideration. In one painful case of trial for murder, we are authoritatively advised that the special verdict of the jury, "guilty, but insane," does not in law imply that the practitioner charged has been "convicted in England . . . of any felony." The COUNCIL is therefore not free to take up a charge against this practitioner or to direct the REGISTRAR to erase his name from the *Register*, as if it were a case of conviction in terms of Section 29 of the *Medical Act*, 1858.

An attempt has been made, in pursuance of suggestions made by members, to improve the acoustics of this chamber by rearranging the seats. The experience of the Session, which will probably not be a long one, will guide us in deciding whether further changes are necessary.

